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ABSTRACT

The formal evaluation process (FEP) is the primary tool provided by most two- and four-year colleges and universities to create more effective teachers. Yet, the FEP has little impact on teaching practice. The FEP serves merely to classify a teacher as a success or failure based on written records and rating scales from observations conducted every 2 to 3 years. In this system, teacher performance ratings are utilized to provide rewards and punishment without achieving the important goal of improving instruction. Classroom observations and peer review, two common segments of the FEP, are seen as either threatening to professional autonomy or consisting of data which are unlikely to inspire teachers to change their methods or philosophies of teaching. While FEP may never fully address the issue of instructional improvement, certain modifications could lead to more substantial contributions. The initial stage of the FEP should be restructured to develop mutually acceptable arrangements for the mode, timing, and conditions of evaluation, giving teachers some control over the process. In addition, students, faculty, and administrators need training in order to participate in an evaluation process that can lead to change. Four alternative methods of evaluation could be used to facilitate formative evaluation: staff development programs, self-evaluation processes, classroom research, and peer coaching. (JMC)

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IMPROVING TEACHER EVALUATION

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Introduction

"Some of the most controversial issues in faculty development revolve around questions about how we should assess faculty members' teaching effectiveness" (Wilson, 1990). While the formal evaluation process (FEP), as based in contractual agreement, is the primary tool provided by most 2- and 4-year colleges and universities to create more effective teachers, tenured faculty, for a variety of reasons, find the process failing to improve teaching practice. (Spencer & Flyr, 1991).

The FEP has become quite divorced from the issue of teaching effectiveness and now centers on the classification of a teacher as a success or failure through written records and rating scales from observations conducted once every 2-3 years rather than concerning itself with a teacher's goals, conception of the learner, or personal philosophy of education (Medley, 1987). Currently, teacher performance ratings are utilized to provide extrinsic rewards (merit pay, recognition, promotion, tenure) and punishment (dismissal, assignment to the worst committees, classes, and schedules, fall from grace within the power structure), without achieving the important goal of improvement of instruction (Spencer & Flyr, 1991).

While all colleges purport to utilize the FEP as a means of attaining and maintaining effective teaching, its effectiveness as such is inhibited by the lack of a

definitive definition of just what effective teaching is and how it should be evaluated.

> Different people employ different criteria and approaches to the evaluation of teachers. Some prefer to approach effectiveness from the point of view of results or products. Some prefer to approach effectiveness from the point of view of personal prerequisites; some from the teacher-pupil behaviors; some from basic knowledge, attitudes, and skill; and some from the point of view of results or products. These different people employ different criteria and approaches to the evaluation of teachers and these different approaches give different answers to the question, "Is this teacher an effective teacher?" (McNeil, 1982).

Use of the FEP as an improvement of instruction tool is further retarded because while administrators know what is important in the classroom, they are not credited by teachers as one who can offer advice on achieving it. A nationwide survey of accredited 4-year undergraduate, liberal arts colleges found that the quality of classroom teaching is seen by 98 percent of the responding deans as the single most important consideration in evaluating performance (Seldin, 1984). However, current research finds that faculty credit the implementation of change in the classroom to administrative feedback from the FEP at a rate

of less than two percent (Spencer & Flyr, 1991). Kimball Wiles reports that in a study of 2500 teachers, he found only a small fraction (1.5 percent) perceive their supervisor as a source of new ideas (1967).

Teachers may negate administrative suggestions as "secondhand information and soft data" for several reasons (Weinback & Randolph, 1984). One, administrators typically have been out of the classroom long enough for teachers to view their teaching skills as "rusty". Secondly, some teachers consider the sparse classroom observations an inappropriate data base on which performance ratings can be made much less a source of noteworthy suggestions for improvement of instruction.

Compounding the problem is the element of fear. Cogan studies of teacher supervision provide the basis for his conclusion that "psychologically [supervision] is almost inevitably viewed as an active threat to the teacher, possibly endangering his professional standing and undermining his confidence" (1961). This threatening nature combined with a lack of regard for supervisor input may offer substantial explanation for the lack of classroom change due to the administrative segment of the FEP.

Peer input from the FEP is used by teachers more often than administrative feedback to make changes, however, the impact in the classroom remains relatively small. Reluctance of teachers to use peer evaluation to create instructional

change may be a result of a "lack of trust in one's colleagues and/or skepticism regarding their ability to evaluate teaching competence objectively" (Weinbach & Randolph, 1984). The most feared methods of peer review, such as in-class observation and/or review of tapes or films of faculty members' teaching are rarely utilized. In 1990 peer review was mandated by California law (SB1725) for California community colleges. However, many resist extensive use of this segment, and those not effected by the legislation continue to ignore it.

As classroom observations are seen as threatening to professional autonomy, the peer process tends to base evaluation upon soft data in the form of student evaluations, teacher behavior in faculty meetings, and objective criteria such as course outlines, syllabi, or other related materials as brought to the evaluation process by the evalutee. This type data of gathering is unlikely to inspire teachers to make substantial changes in their methods or philosophies of teaching. The culmination of these factors may explain why faculty use feedback from the peer review segment of the FEP to create change in their classrooms only 8 percent of the time (Spencer & Flyr, 1991).

Improving the FEP

While unlikely that the FEP can ever fully address the issue of improvement of instruction, certain modifications

could enable it to make a more substantial contribution. The evaluation of teachers should be restructured to accommodate two distinctly different processes: summative and formative evaluation. A clear distinction exists between summative and formative evaluation and these two processes should be incorporated, yet held separate to be used for the purpose which they effectively address.

The current formal FEP of college and university teachers is a summative process. The FEP typically includes administrative, peer, and student segments. Each segment provides information that serves to place a teacher on a rating scale. Competence is determined by measuring past practice, a teacher's success or failure to meet certain criteria upon completion of an task or time period. Thus, the FEP is summative in nature as it is retroactive, occurring after-the-fact.

Formative evaluation is pro-active, occurring before the final analysis. It provides the feedback and support mechanisms which facilitate the type of change that leads to considered alterations in teaching strategies, activities, and philosophies (Popham, 1988).

Evaluation, both summative and formative, that incorporates a variety of data and data collection methods is most valid and useful to teachers themselves. Such methods include, but are not limited to classroom observations, peer ratings, teacher interviews, evaluation

of course-related materials, samples of students' work, self-evaluation, as well as ratings of both present and past students.

To be valid, such data must be collected on a regular basis over an extended period of time involving different teaching situations and classes. To be utilized by teachers, such data must be founded in what a teacher knows to be true about self and presented in a objective, non-judgmental manner.

Evaluation should be structured so that it first clearly defines the teaching goals of the individual teacher and then works to assess and provide the type of feedback that a teacher can use to become more effective (Tyler, 1949). Different teachers from different disciplines have different basic assumptions about subject matter and how it is best learned. Effective evaluation will define these basic assumptions as they provide the basis for a teachers's goals and objectives, and tailor a process that evaluates teaching as it is disciple specific rather than in some generic form.

The initial stage of the FEP should be restructured to provide a process that develops mutually acceptable arrangements for mode, timing, and conditions of evaluation, giving the teacher some control over the process. Agreement among the evaluation team must be arrived at as to how many observations, under what conditions, are necessary to

provide salient data on teacher effectiveness and feedback to facilitate further growth. The revised process would establish the criteria of evaluation pertinent to each individual teacher considering the goals which they seek to achieve in their own classrooms. It would conclude with a statement of commitment made by the evalutee as to areas of potential growth to be assessed at the next evaluation. A teacher who has a sense of ownership is more likely to use the process as a means for self-improvement rather than feeling used by it.

Secondly, before the process can ever become an impetus to improvement of instruction, students, faculty and administrators alike need to be trained as to how to participate in an evaluation process that can lead to change. Planning sessions and special skills are prerequisites to the conduct of classroom observations and eliciting of feedback that will be considered relevant by the evalutee as well as other members of the evaluation team.

A valid argument against the implementation of effective evaluation is the expense that would evolve from the training of students, administrators, and faculty in techniques of observation and supervision that do lead to improvement of instruction as well as the time-consuming process of implementing these techniques. However, I

suggest that time and dollars spent in this manner would be a wise investment.

Once the mode of the evaluation process has been modified, provision must be made for the support measures necessary for faculty to implement change. Release time, materials, supplies, recognition of efforts and achievements are examples of the types of support that individual teachers will need for continued instructional improvement.

Alternative Methods of Evaluation

Four alternative methods of evaluation that could be used to create an process facilitating formative evaluation are staff development programs, self-evaluation processes, classroom research, and peer coaching.

Staff Development Programs

Ongoing staff development programs are effective when they are in place before a problem occurs rather than used as a retroactive tool to correct a situation. Such programs need a variety of support systems such as financial backing, campus recognition, and release time for faculty and coordinators. The greatest growth occurs in staff development programs in which the participants claim total ownership and are the driving force behind their development. Overall, greater strides are taken by like-minded individuals who share common, but distinctly defined goals.

To facilitate teacher growth and improvement of instruction staff development programs must be constantly supported, valued, monitored, reevaluated, and grow as the participants grow. Such programs can effectively "...work with those faculty who want to change and help them improve their effectiveness" (Wilson, 1990).

Self-evaluation

Individual teachers do the things that lead to improved instruction when they identify their own strengths and weaknesses and set personal goals based on this list. Educational theory supports the premise that learners assimilate and accommodate knowledge and even create new knowledge more effectively when they are allowed to investigate and take action upon their own questions and concerns. Teachers are learners too.

Used in conjunction with the FEP, self-evaluation has proven ineffective as an improvement of instruction tool due to the perceived risk encountered by a faculty member who exposes self-weaknesses or performance deficiencies. "If there are significant contingencies associated with the teacher evaluation activity, most teachers will provide inflated estimates of their instructional skills" (Popham, 1988). Teachers obviously consider promotion, tenure, and pay issues to be "significant contingencies". As a formative process utilized for the sole purpose of teacher growth, self-evaluation can be extremely useful to establish

the precise areas in which the individual teacher wishes to improve, however, to utilize such a process a teacher must be provided with safe and protected conditions.

Classroom Research

Classroom research provides a means for any teacher on an individual basis, or in a small group, to find the answers to the specific problems faced in their own environment (Cross, 1990). Classroom research, also known as "action research" (Allen, et al., 1988; Strickland, 1988), is research leading to action that directly and intimately improves the quality of the teaching/learning relationship. The characteristics of classroom research that facilitate change are:

1) teacher initiation and direction,
2) non-threatening nature,
3) occurring in the natural teaching environment,
4) focus on student metacognition, and
5) increased productive interactions between teacher and student.

These five characteristics set the stage for a formative process that supports teacher growth. To encourage such growth, administration should ask only for proof that faculty are engaging in activities that lead to improvement of instruction, rather than individual teacher results from these activities.

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is not to be confused with peer review which is a part of the FEP at many institutions. The conduct of a 1987 literature review brought Weinback and Randolph to the conclusion that "[a]pparently the degree of resistance to peer review is directly related to the form of evaluation used" indicating that colleagues can be an effective source of information if the interaction occurs in the proper environment.

While teachers tend not to use feedback from peer review in the classroom, peer coaching is effective in creating change. Peer coaching provides for planning sessions, non-judgmental classroom observations, systematic and continual feedback. The construction of such a process, conducive to change, can create a process likely to lead to the improvement of instruction.

A study by Munro and Elliott that compares instructional goal achievement in peer coaching to the achievement of goals under direct classroom supervision by supervisors reports that the 41 instructors at an Illinois High School who participated in their study "stated that the frequency of observations by peers and the high comfort level with peers, which allowed for open discussion of problems and concerns, lead to a much higher rate of instructional growth than when working with supervisors" (1987). However, special skills are prerequisites to the

conduct of evaluation that will be considered relevant by teachers. Provision for this training is crucial to the professional growth of teachers.

Conclusion

This era of increasing accountability calls for increased teaching effectiveness. However, any evaluation process, summative or formative, will be used by individual teachers to create such change only when they view it as focusing on the teaching/learning process and how it can be improved. If we are to proceed under the illusion that the FEP leads to improved instruction, it is necessary to create a segment or format distinctly separate from the process of classifying teachers for purpose of pay, retention or dismissal.

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